

## **ANTI-AMERICANISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS**

**Address by U.S. Ambassador Charles J. Swindells**

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Thank you, Sir Kenneth, for that kind introduction and thank you, ladies and gentlemen for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today.

I would like to talk to you about a phenomenon that has actually been around for a while, but has in recent years come to be called "anti-Americanism." I am talking about empty, inaccurate criticism of U.S. ideals or actions that offers no constructive alternatives and gives no credit where credit is due. I am talking about criticism that rejects policies because they came from America or look "too American," criticism that is at heart an attack on those who seek basic human freedoms.

In my travels around your beautiful country, I have not found such anti-Americanism to be widespread among New Zealanders. But anti-Americanism is an important subject that is being discussed widely in diplomatic circles and by US officials around the world. I believe its influence on international relations and public discussion of foreign policy deserves attention. And I hope that my remarks might help people here see anti-Americanism for what it really is.

I am not alone in that hope. Young New Zealanders like Lara Mark-stein, who wrote an excellent essay on the subject for "The College Herald," have also raised the dangers of anti-Americanism in dealing with foreign policy issues. And I am sure that many of you have also been wrestling with the problems posed by anti-Americanism in international affairs.

Now that I have defined what anti-Americanism is, let me make very clear what it is not. I do not believe that factual, well-reasoned criticism of a U.S. Government policy or some aspect of American society is anti-American. Far from it!

Of course, none of us likes to be criticized. And we may not agree with specific arguments, even if they are well reasoned. But if you have caused us to examine ourselves and re-examine the facts, if you have forced us to avoid

complacency, you will have contributed to making the United States a better nation and Americans a better people.

We are a nation that has been as open to constructive criticism and new ways of doing things as any in history. Our political institutions are designed to encourage a diversity of views and competition among ideas. They have built-in means of limiting the power of the few to force their views on the many. Within the Executive Branch of the Government, for which I work, the interagency policy process rarely rubber-stamps the ideas of any particular individual, including those of the President. As Ambassador, I've had a front-row seat to witness some of these interagency debates, and I can assure you that they are not for the faint-hearted! And even if we don't get a given policy right the first time, we can be sure that the Congress and the Courts will let us know!

We have this attitude because the founders of our nation understood that the world is ever changing. Yesterday's momentary perfection will no longer meet the standards of a new day. So by all means, marshal your facts, refine your arguments, propose your alternative policies. Fire away, and we'll all be the better for it!

So, having distinguished the difference between legitimate criticism and anti-Americanism, and having invited legitimate criticism, let me share with you a brief history of anti-Americanism. Then I would then like to touch on a few identifying anti-American themes. Finally, I want to offer some thoughts on who is most affected by anti-Americanism.

One can make a good case that the foundations of anti-Americanism were laid long before the United States ever existed. Europe's settlement of the Western Hemisphere challenged the thinking of its philosophers of the time. For some, this was a positive influence. Objections by some Spaniards to mistreatment of the Aztecs began a dialog on human rights that continues to this day. Others reacted more negatively. Some objected to the settlers' "naïve" optimism that enduring hardship in the present would lead to a better future. Increased information about the actual state of the "noble savages" bothered others.

Many responded by developing a widely held, totally unexamined and completely inaccurate view of the backwardness of the New World. According to them, its poor climate and soil could not sustain real agriculture. It was a cultural wasteland that would never produce real music, art or literature. Perfectly respectable Europeans would immediately become moral and intellectual degenerates just by setting foot on the soil of the New World and breathing its poisonous air. (You may recognize the repetition of some of these themes as we explore anti-Americanism today.)

But the impetus for current anti-Americanism dates from the 1980s. Ronald Reagan came along with his unflappable optimism about the future of our nation

and the self-destruction of communism. There were those who sympathized with communist ideology. There were those who wanted to impose their own values on their neighbors. And there were those who simply wanted a "Third Way" between America's so-called savage economic freedoms and Communism's tyranny. For them, Reagan was a real threat. His decision to deploy cruise missiles in Europe and his call for the Berlin Wall to be torn down were seen as needlessly confrontational. Even noted American intellectuals like Arthur Schlesinger argued that Reagan's assessment of the Soviet Union's economic and social weaknesses was wrong.

Of course, Reagan was proved right and the pundits wrong, though so far as I can tell, none of them has ever admitted it.

So communism collapsed. The Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain it represented were torn down, not by an invading army, but by the long-suffering peoples of Eastern Europe. Russians and Chinese soon became more capitalist than most Americans. Die-hard leftists suddenly faced a similar challenge to that of earlier intellectuals confronted by the New World. Many responded by creating and then criticizing a straw man America every bit as silly and inaccurate as that created by their ancestors. Criticism of this false image of America has become the cornerstone of current anti-Americanism. I would contend that this criticism is used mainly to attack those outside of the United States who favor liberty, whether economic, cultural or political.

Against this historical background let's look at a few anti-American themes that have become increasingly common in public discourse. Remember, these are the criticisms that verge on bigotry, not reasoned criticisms that offer alternatives.

One of my personal favorites is "the McDonaldization of the planet." This phrase is used to claim that American marketing prowess is forcing people all over the world to narrow their choices of food, lodging, and entertainment to a lowest common denominator based on American mass culture.

It is true that advertising and marketing influence our choices, in addition to providing useful information for potential customers. But ask yourself, "How much would you have to spend on advertising to convince a devout Hindu to eat an all-beef Big Mac?" In fact, it is impossible to sell a product unless that product responds to the local culture. The history of marketing is filled with stories of companies who have ignored local culture or consumer preferences to their peril. The classic story is Chevrolet's effort to market the Chevy Nova in Mexico, without understanding that in Spanish, "no va" means "it doesn't go."

Better yet, take the case of McDonald's, since that seems to be the anti-American crowd's favorite example. McDonald's restaurants in India do not

serve beef. McDonald's restaurants in Canada serve French fries with gravy and cheese curd. McDonald's restaurants worldwide have introduced new salads and other products to respond to increasing health demands by consumers. Like any other global business, McDonald's knows that it is more profitable to find out what customers want and offer it to them than it is to spend a lot of money attempting to convince them to buy something they don't want.

Fact is, people all over the world now have far more diversity of choice in food, films, travel and lodging, news and entertainment sources, clothing, and other products than they have ever had in recorded history. The alternative to giving you the freedom to choose is having someone else, probably a government bureaucrat like me, choose for you.

So I say to the "McDonaldization" crowd: "Don't just sit there in your Holiday Inn, watching "I Love Lucy" reruns while munching on your Big Mac, and resenting it! Get out more! Enjoy the many fruits of economic liberty!"

I'd like to add a word here about the supposed predominance of American culture. Culture is based in large measure on shared values. The anti-American gang claims we Americans are forcing our values on the rest of the world through what they call "cultural imperialism." Well, I'm here to tell you that they have got it all wrong. We did not begin as a nation with some unique, homegrown set of values that we are now trying to spread worldwide. Just the opposite!

We began by embracing a universal set of values -- democracy, rule of law, economic liberty, freedom of expression -- that by their very nature appeal to most people on the planet. That is why we have attracted and continue to attract so many immigrants and have benefited from their cultural contributions. How do the anti-Americans deal with the fact that our diverse ethnic make-up makes us more fully representative of the human race than most other nations? Or that we still attract millions of immigrants from all over the world? I'll tell you how -- by completely ignoring it!

America's embrace of universal values certainly appeals to Egyptian playwright Ali Salem, who is quoted in Foreign Policy magazine as saying the following about the United States:

"People say that Americans are arrogant, but it's not true. Americans enjoy life and they are proud of their lives...Trying to understand [anti-Americanism] with logic is like measuring distance in kilograms... These are people who are envious. To them, life is unbearable. Modernism is the only way out. But modernism is frightening. It means we have to

compete. It means we can't explain everything away with conspiracy theories."

Next I would like to examine the theme of "the American Empire." This is the imaginary imperial ideology that has supposedly driven us to become a hyper-power.

First, let's take a brief look at the origins of American economic, political and military power. Now, I am a patriotic American. I love my country and I am proud of its many accomplishments. But I'd like to suggest that America's status as a superpower has been largely thrust upon us.

Prior to World War I, the United States was not considered among the great global powers. In fact, the founders of our nation profoundly distrusted the power of the state. That is why we have a separation of state power into the executive, legislative and judicial branches. That is why we have constitutional checks and balances that limit the influence of each. And that is why America was reluctant to engage in the realpolitik that marked international relations through the end of the Great War. All this changed as the world tried to come to grips with the tremendous economic, social and political upheaval that began with that War, and to some degree continues to the present day.

It was the intellectual and moral bankruptcy of early 20th century realpolitik that motivated Woodrow Wilson to promote collective security as an alternative. In the minds of many Europeans, America went suddenly from being a land of bumpkins breathing poisoned air, to being, in the words of a French commentator at the time, "the salvation of Europe."

It is perhaps useful for the anti-Americans to remind themselves that the U.S. did not start the Great War or World War II, though we did help finish them. We didn't even start the Vietnam War – we inherited it!

My point is simply this:

-- Failure of nations to address the security of their own region results in a vacuum that some other power will try to fill;

How should America respond to this?

-- Failure to spend enough on defense to meet security needs will result in increased dependence on someone else and reduced ability to implement an independent foreign policy;

How should America respond to this?

-- Failure to embrace economic liberty, to let people learn from their mistakes on the road to success, to encourage empowerment over dependency, these failures give an edge to competing countries that pursue social justice without trampling on justice for the individual;

How should America respond to this?

While we, too, have failed from time to time, we have done our best to offer our citizens, millions of immigrants, and freedom-loving people in other lands enough liberty to chart their own course in life. We have tried to offer enough hope and practical encouragement to help them weather the inevitable storms they may face. Most importantly, we have offered the freedom to fail and restart the journey as often as is necessary. Some nations, like New Zealand, have also given their best efforts to these worthwhile endeavors. If others have not,

How should America respond to this?

If America does not act to address these issues, we are accused of isolationism. If we encourage the international community to address these matters, we are accused of bullying. If we join in coalition with like-minded nations to address these shortcomings, we are accused of unilateralism. To quote the student I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, "It appears that according to international opinion, America should not take up arms unless it is explicitly told to do so."

A related, equally misleading theme is the false dichotomy between the United Nations and the United States – as though we were not a member and strong supporter of the UN. Now, you are a group that understands international affairs. Most of you would agree that it is hard to find a good example of any undertaking by the United Nations that has made a practical difference in the world without the full support of the United States. Whether it is our funding of one-quarter of the UN's budget, the peacekeepers we provide, or our general support for the concept of collective security, we play a role in all that the UN does.

I would argue that even on Iraq, we tried to strengthen collective security. The fact that the United Nations failed, after twelve years of trying, to convince Saddam Hussein to fulfill twelve resolutions requiring Iraq to reveal the fate of its nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programs is conveniently forgotten. Does anyone honestly believe that somehow another year would have resulted in a sudden attack of honesty in a man who lived by deception?

Fact is, all of us are still trying to come to grips with the monumental changes that have taken place in our world since the mid-1980s. It is very human when

faced with new circumstances to be unsure of what to do; so we keep on doing what we've always done until forced to do otherwise. That is the criticism the September 11 Commission levied on U.S. intelligence agencies. It is equally valid for the United Nations.

The question we should be addressing is how to take an institution designed to deal with the Cold War and transform it to deal with the world of today. In today's world, the threat of nuclear annihilation comes from the willingness of states like North Korea, rogue officials like the head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program, or desperate and unemployed scientists of the former Soviet Union to sell technology, nuclear fuel or even completed weapons to the highest bidder.

We were very fortunate that Iraq's nuclear weapons specialists made their money by lying to Saddam Hussein rather than developing weapons and selling them. Instead of being critical of the fact that the United States believed that such weapons might exist, we should be heaving a collective sigh of relief that everyone – including possibly Saddam himself – was bamboozled by Iraqi scientists attempting to protect their own necks! Would we have known the truth had the Coalition not intervened? Or would Saddam Hussein still be playing cat-and-mouse with UN weapons inspectors and would the world still be worried about what nasty surprises he might be preparing?

The attempt by the International Atomic Energy Agency to curb Iran's development of nuclear weapons, and its call for strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty show that this important UN institution has been re-invigorated. More work needs to be done, and we look for leadership from countries like New Zealand in this important effort. Your Government's support for the Proliferation Security Initiative and the G-8 Global Partnership for dealing with the remains of Soviet WMD programs is greatly appreciated, and we look forward to a similar level of principle in dealing with Iran.

Apart from weapons of mass destruction, the greatest threats to the security of the world's people come from acts of terror perpetrated by tyrannical regimes against their own people or by faceless networks like al-Qaeda. In addition to the September 11 attacks, as well as the bombings in Bali, Madrid, and elsewhere, we must also deal with effects of genocide in Rwanda, Bosnia and the Sudan. We must confront famine induced by insane economic policies in Zimbabwe. Your Government has taken a strong stand within the Commonwealth on the latter issue. I deeply regret that others, especially some African members, have stalled New Zealand's efforts to encourage much needed change in that troubled land.

The U.S. versus UN theme ignores a very important fact. In order for collective security to work, it must aim for the security of all the members of the collective.

Ignoring the real concerns of any member, including the United States, undermines collective security. Using UN institutions as a means to limit U.S. economic and military power, is not only doomed to failure, it undermines the very concept of collective security. Those who try to use the United Nations in this way, whether by allowing Saddam Hussein to ignore resolution after resolution for 12 years or by using UNESCO to restrict America's highly successful trade in cultural goods and services (to give two examples) are not just anti-American -- they are anti-United Nations.

Having laid out some examples of the themes that anti-Americanism gives rise to, let's take a look at who is really hurt by it. Take, for example, the bombing of a McDonald's restaurant in the French province of Brittany, done in the name of anti-Americanism four years ago. It deprived the French franchise owner of income for a time and cost his French insurer a considerable sum to restore the restaurant. It temporarily deprived the French consumers of one of their many choices of eating-place. To the anti-American crowd, the symbolism of the act was worth more than the costs, particularly since the costs were borne by someone other than themselves. But what about the young French woman who was killed in the blast? Is there any anti-American pundit willing to step up and be held accountable for that result?

Who is hurt by anti-Americanism? I close with a quote from John Parker, of the New York Times:

"...the costs of anti-Americanism will be borne not by Americans, but by others.... Cubans, North Koreans, Zimbabweans, and countless others suffer and starve under their respective tyrannies because the democratic world's chattering classes, obsessed with denouncing the United States, can't be bothered with holding their criminal regimes to account.... Indeed, it is not the slightest exaggeration to say that in 2004, anti-American sentiment has become the biggest single obstacle to human progress. It sustains repressive dictatorships everywhere; excuses corruption, torture, the oppression of women and mass murder; ... the global anti-American elite has massively failed to fulfill the most fundamental responsibility of the intellectual class: to provide dispassionate, truthful analysis that can guide society to make proper decisions."

I have not offered these thoughts in a vain attempt to sway the opinions of the anti-American crowd. But I want reasonable people in New Zealand and elsewhere to recognize anti-Americanism for what it is, and to see the dangers it poses. I want our dialogue on issues we agree are of utmost importance to be free of prejudice, aimed at finding real solutions to common problems. For example, when people talk about what the United States is doing to fight

HIV/AIDS, by all means, let's discuss whether the seven percent of our funding that we devote in part to abstinence-based programs is effective in the cultures where it is spent. But let's also talk about the 93 percent that we spend on more conventional anti-AIDS programs. And let's not forget to mention that the United States is spending as much to fight HIV/AIDS as the rest of the world combined.

When we talk about the Middle East Peace Process, let's not criticize the Bush Administration for not intervening, and then take another shot at the U.S. when it does intervene. The same can be said for our involvement in the Balkans, where Europe's political leaders asked the United States to intervene, even though it was not clear that our interests or security were threatened by the conflict, nor was there much evidence that Europe had done all it could to deal with the problem. In the end, we helped out, though in hindsight, our efforts in the Balkans may have diverted crucial military, intelligence and political capital from counterterrorism just when it might have had the greatest impact in slowing or stopping the rise of al-Qaeda. But in reality, you can only do what you can do, and do it the best you can.

Let me emphasize, Americans are fallible like everybody else. We know that.

But, to quote Ms. Markstein, "...even if the Americans are only human, at least they are humans with ideals."

The United States does not promise that we will always get it right. No one can promise that.

The United States does not promise that we will intervene in every conflict or solve every problem.

But we can promise that when we are confronted by the tough choices this world brings, we will not ignore them. We will continue to make the best decisions we can, based on the best information available at the time.

We will continue to do whatever it takes to secure liberty for ourselves and for our future generations. And we will help others achieve those benefits whenever that is what they want and we can make a difference.

While we will not waste time on nay-sayers who bring nothing constructive to the table, we will continue to listen to legitimate criticism. And we will welcome those who come to us with viable alternatives and reasoned arguments.

Thank you for your attention.